



International Joint Commission
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SOLEC 98: Working toward development of Great Lakes indicators

The third **State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC 98)** will be held in Buffalo, New York, October 21-23, 1998. SOLEC participants are decision-makers from governments at all levels, private industry, environmental groups, First Nations/tribes, health professionals, universities, agriculture and others. SOLEC is a working meeting where decision-makers review draft material prepared for the conference. The input received at SOLEC is incorporated into the State of the Lakes report, which the parties to the **Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement** (Canada and the United States) publish about nine months after SOLEC.

What are we trying to achieve for SOLEC 98 and beyond?

The parties have an obligation to report on the state of the Great Lakes and on progress toward the goals of the Agreement. The State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference was created to fulfill this obligation in part.

The **International Joint Commission** has a responsibility to evaluate progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the Agreement. A set of indicators that is relevant to both the IJC and the parties will prevent a dilution of monitoring effort for competing purposes and will foster cooperation between the parties and the IJC for the common good of the Great Lakes ecosystem. Data will be collected, commonly shared and made available on a timely basis. This system of a shared set of indicators will be flexible enough to expand to take into account new emerging issues.

Why is a SOLEC Indicators List Important?

The demand for high quality, relevant data concerning the health of various components of the Great Lakes ecosystem has been escalating rapidly for at least a decade. Environmental management agencies are being asked to demonstrate that past programs have been successful and that the success of future or continuing programs will be commensurate with the human and financial resources expended. At the same time, the amount of taxpayer dollars being devoted to

Great Lakes environmental issues is decreasing in both countries. The demand for high quality data, while operating with limited resources, is forcing environmental and natural resource agencies to be more selective and more efficient in the collection and analysis of data.

The most efficient data collection efforts will be those that are cost-effective and relevant to multiple users. An understanding by stakeholders about what information is necessary and sufficient to characterize the state of Great Lakes ecosystem health through the use of indicators, and to measure progress toward ecosystem goals, would facilitate efficient monitoring and reporting programs.

Other subjects to be discussed at SOLEC 98

In SOLEC 96, the idea of a Biodiversity Investment Area was first proposed in the Land by the Lakes paper to identify high quality areas in the terrestrial nearshore for protection. In a sense, these areas are at the other end of the spectrum from Areas of Concern. In SOLEC 98, we will be presenting papers on Biodiversity Investment Areas for the terrestrial nearshore, coastal wetlands, and open waters.

Although the invitation list for SOLEC 98 is limited, inquiries concerning participation may be directed to Harvey Shear, Environment Canada, (416)739-4704, harvey.shear@ec.gc.ca or Paul Horvatin, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, (312)353-3612, horvatin.paul@epamail.epa.gov. Visit the SOLEC web sites at <http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/solec/> or <http://www.epa.gov/grtlakes/solec/>.